

Akobaye Drexall Stafford, 38, "Gone too soon"

Written by Julian Stafford, Ed. D. & Jan Stafford
Friday, 12 November 2010 14:33



Akobaye Drexall Stafford, age 38, died on Saturday, October 31, 2010 in Corvallis, OR. In his short life, Ako was a husband, father, poet, an outstanding athlete, soldier, college-athlete academic adviser and special-education foster-care provider. On Friday, November 19th at 10 am, a military interment will be held for Ako at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in St. Paul. A memorial will follow at 11:30 am at Progressive Baptist Church on 1505 Burns Avenue in St. Paul. Michael Jackson's song, "*Gone Too Soon*" (1991) expresses the feeling we have regarding our lost.

We have learned a lot in the days that followed Ako's death about his passions, curiosity, generosity, and willingness to lend a helping hand. The clarity came not because of something Ako said or did, but through the outpouring of love and support we all received from so many friends. It became clear that the friends he made and the depth of those friendships revealed Ako's beautiful spirit. He never said, "This is how you treat people." Instead he modeled it.

We never saw him treat anyone badly nor speak poorly about anyone. He was warm-hearted and non-judgmental of people. Most importantly, he taught us to be more giving. He demonstrated how to give people love, treat them with kindness, respect and let people know that they matter, no matter their station in life. That might seem small or even ordinary to some, but it is the true measure of the man and gave us a glimpse into the depth of his soul.

Losing one's nephew is never easy. Letting go is a painful challenge as we remember the beautiful baby in the crib, the proud boy in his Boys-Scout uniform, the handsome strong teenager in the American Legion Baseball and football jerseys and the brave young man in the soldier uniform. To so many who are helping us with his lost, with dignity, grace and glory, we

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thank you, humbly and kindly. Gone too soon - the words speak of his passing, we pause and reflect:

*"Born to amuse, to inspire, to delight
Here one day - Gone one night ..."*

Ako was born September 29, 1972, to Pompey and Florence Stafford in Saint Paul. He attended both elementary and middle school and participated on numerous athletic teams in Shoreview, MN before matriculating at Saint Thomas Academy in Mendota Heights, MN. He graduated from Saint Thomas in June 1990. Ako was not only an excellent student at Saint Thomas Academy, but he was also an outstanding athlete. He was a member of the track team and played both varsity basketball and football. In the latter, he made All-Metro and All-State his senior year and "sacked" a future Heisman Trophy winner several times in due course. For his football prowess Ako earned a four-year football scholarship to the University of Maine (1990-95) in Bangor, ME. At the university, he was an All-Conference linebacker as a leading tackler on the team. His coaches and teammates loved him. Ako was also invited to try out with several professional football teams.

Educational obtainment was a priority for Ako. He sought a bachelor's degree in secondary education from the University of Maine. With a bachelor's, he envisioned a productive career in public school secondary education. Many people who Ako encountered spoke about his character, kindness, sense of fairness, determination and humility. They espoused that such qualities would make him an excellent educator, as well as an enduring role model for students. This speaks to his ability to write beautiful, introspective poetry.

While in college Ako responded to a more immediate calling. He volunteered for the United States Army. He was a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division based at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, NC. While in the service he made more than fifty parachute jumps. Upon being honorably discharged, he re-enrolled at his alma-mater to complete the necessary course work for his bachelor's degree in secondary education. While there he met and married Tamara Ellis, his beloved wife of twelve exciting years.

After receiving his master's degree in College-Student Service Administration from the University of Oregon in Corvallis Oregon, Ako provided academic and social support to student-athletes at several stellar institutions. His first stop was at the University of Oregon; second at the Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, LA; after which he returned to his beloved University of Oregon. Then again, he was most passionate about being a special-needs foster parent provider and caretaker for the State of Oregon, working with children with severe learning and physical disabilities. This was done with compassionate temerity.

The vast expressions of sympathy are a testament to the way Ako lived his life and how deeply he touched others. I'm not sure how we would, or could, respond individually to the hundreds and hundreds of people who sent condolences through messages on Facebook, e-mail, text and Twitter. So many people have sent well wishes in cards, flowers, through letters of sympathy and telephone calls. And many more have posted on Ako's online obituary. We are

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so grateful for your support during our period of enormous emotional grief and sorrow.

Survivors include his parents, Pompey and Florence Stafford of Shoreview, MN; wife, Tamara Ellis-Stafford of Corvallis; two daughters, Kiaya and Jadyne; a brother, Abebi Stafford of Alexandria, VA; a sister, Beulah ("Peaches") Brawer-Shaw of Charlotte, NC; a niece; three nephews, and a host of aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, friends and acquaintances throughout the United States. To depart in the prime of life in modernity is:

*"Like a comet, Blazing 'cross the evening sky
Gone too soon
Like a sunset, dying with the rising of the moon
Gone too soon - Gone too soon."*